The Builder.

SATURDAY, NOVEMBER 6, 1852.

OUR friends in the operative classes need never hesitate about writing to us (as some of them say they do), when they have any information to communicate or suggestions to make. We trust they know that we regard with interest whatever seems likely to improve the condition of the masses of the community, and would lend any aid in our power to advance this object. We may not always be able to attend at once to matters suggested to us, and sometimes, of course, may not consider it desirable to do so at all; but such communications will always be received by us with pleasure, and be certain of our attention. To those who simply write complaining of their special circumstances (we have two such letters before us at this moment) we can scarcely be of any service beyond reminding them that,—

"We have always enough to bear—
We have always a something to do—
We have never to seek for care,
When we have the world to get through!"

"There's nothing that sorrow can yield,
Excepting a harvest of pain;
Far better to seek fortune's field,
And till it and plough it again!
The weight that *exertion* can move,
The gloom that *decision* may span,
The manhood within us but prove!
So keep the heart light as you can."

It seems to us, we may be wrong, but it certainly seems to us that the artizans of the United Kingdom have never had a better prospect before them than they have now. Nothing is to be done without industry, right-endeavour, and good conduct; but with these they all may, if they please, maintain themselves respectably, and make satisfactory progress.

"All is the gift of *Industry*: whate'er
Exalts, embellishes, and renders life
Delightful."

We will say a word or two more on this point, however, when we have noticed two or three letters from correspondents who sign themselves working men. "J. P." writing from Oxford, comments with gratification on Mr. Peto's recent reference, at the dinner of the Builders' Benevolent Institution, to his training in the workshop, but says he "should have been more pleased to have seen that he had headed a list of contributions towards the building of some almshouses for the reception of artizans, instead of leaving them to fly to our unions, and mix with persons that every industrious man abominates." He thinks "this suggestion might be carried out in the same manner as the Builders' Benevolent Institution, and that it would be responded to, not only by the masters, but the workmen themselves." None can desire the erection of a provident Retreat for building operatives, one that they have themselves contributed to and can go to as a right, than we do. It seems positively disgraceful to us that there is no such Retreat. "J. P." says "Almshouses," but we do not much like the word. For some there must doubtless be *almshouses*, but the majority might make *for themselves* a sufficient provision against misfortune and poverty in old age, if they would but rightly avail themselves of the power which the principle of association gives. That a right appreciation of this is growing amongst the upper and middle classes is shown by the fact that a sum equal to 150 millions is at this time assured to the survivors of individuals in England and Scotland, but the system requires yet to be largely extended. It must be remembered that there are two or three associations in existence, "The Builders' Foremen," "The Masons," &c. who seek to raise funds for the erection of "Retreats" for their class. What we look for, however, and what we have long advocated, is that general Provident and Benevolent Institution for all connected with building operations, supported by the architects, engineers, contractors, and workmen in one great guild or brotherhood, which would enable all with safety to make provision for the future, and lead by substantial rewards to the spread of habits of forethought and preparation.

A remark on our part, a fortnight ago, with reference to the insurance of workmen's tools, as to the want of an association in which they could confide, has brought us several letters, including one from the secretary of the London "Friendly Society of Carpenters and Joiners," founded as long ago as 1799, and which, as he says, "has always met the demands upon it." We are anxious not to throw any slur upon this or any other honestly conducted society; but the members of it know well enough how many clubs in the country with similar objects have failed, and what distress and privation have been the result to hundreds.

As to this particular society, indeed, without reference to the possibility of delinquency on the part of individuals, we venture to assert that by means of the same payments in a large and scientifically organised association much larger results could be obtained. Still, until we can get the better, we will say nothing to discourage the good. There is one rule, nevertheless, to which we must most strenuously object; and that is No. 8, which compels "each member to pay 6d. per month to the stock, and *spend one pot of porter each time his money is paid*." The evil tendency of this regulation, its injustice, its positive wickedness, are so evident that comment is scarcely necessary, and we do very earnestly urge the well-intentioned directors of the society to rescind it forthwith, and devise some other mode of paying the "landlord" (the only motive, we may suppose, for the rule), without the train of evils which are attached to this. We speak in no captious spirit, but out of sincere good-will.

"Masters should not trust so much to foremen," writes one, himself a foreman, "but should themselves see to the progress of their various works, and pay the men themselves." Very good advice where practicable, but out of the question with the great capitalist builders of the metropolis, with their one, two, and three thousand men at work for them at the same time. "The evil is," he goes on to say, "that the foremen employ men whom they happen to know, without caring much about their worth, while many good men are left unemployed."

At the present moment we are disposed to think there are comparatively *few* really good workmen out of employ, and while bread and other necessaries of life are cheap, wages are high. At Manchester, in May 1725, we find two justices of the peace settling for "Mayeons, carpenters, joiners, plumbers, tylers, sclaters, bricklayers, and plasterers," that "none shall take for his work for the day, without meat or drink, above 1s.—nor with meat and drink above 6d. The master-workman, who has others working under his direction, not above 1s. 2d."* They were appointed to work from "five in the morning till betwixt seven and eight at the night, from the midst of March to the middle of September; and from the midst of September to the midst of March, to work from the spring of day till night, except at breakfast half an hour, at dinner an hour, at drinking half an hour; and, in the summer half-year, they may sleep, each day, half an hour; else, for every hour's absence, to defaulk a penny; and every Saturday afternoon, or eve of a holiday, that they cease to work, is to be accounted but half a day."

"How would the joiners, carpenters, and other artizans of Manchester," says the writer we are quoting, "like to have their wages fixed in this stringent manner at the present day?" [They would not merely not *like* it, but they would not permit it, and very properly too.] "Even the master workman, who superintended the labours of a number of skilled artificers, was only rated 2d. a day above a man who merely guided the plough or handled the spade; while the master tailor was not deemed worthy of a larger sum than was paid to the mere day-labourer. The hours of labour, too, will startle some of those blind idolators of the past, who fancy that previous to the introduction of the factory system the length of a working day was much shorter than it is now. From five in the morning till half-past seven in the evening, with two hours and a half for meals and rest, gives no less than twelve hours of labour altogether, one-half of which was reckoned equal to the cost of a day's board. At the present day, a Manchester joiner, who earns 4s. 4d. for ten hours' labour, can purchase a day's food for one-fourth of that sum, whence it follows that his disposable wages are 200 per cent. higher for ten hours' labour, than a man working at the same trade could have earned in 1725 by working twelve hours."

Compare the prices of things even forty years ago, with the prices now, salt, sugar, tea, butter, soap, flour, clothes;—examine, too, the increase in the average length of life (an important point), and the improvement in material condition is made evident; while if you notice the establishment of elementary drawing schools, artizans' schools, schools of design, and free libraries, you will see a good prospect opening for intellectual advancement. At all events, and we offer the advice only to such as are disposed to take it from us, and will not think us impertinent, Do not fail to give your children the advantage of the means of improvement and ultimate advancement which offer themselves; send your sons to the elementary drawing schools, and encourage in them a taste for reading.

DESTRUCTION OF THE "FIRE-ANNIHILATOR" WORKS BY FIRE.—A somewhat strange event took place on Sunday last, namely, the destruction of Phillips's "Fire Annihilator" Works at Battersea, by fire, and now thstanding the presence and spontaneous explosion of numerous charges of the fire annihilating material. The fire was attributed to incendiary design.

* Quoted in "British Quarterly" for May last.

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